

VZCZCXRO7248
RR RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHBC #0082 2901450
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 161450Z OCT 08
FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0387
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0804
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0841

UNCLAS BASRAH 000082

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BASRA REFERENDUM PROCESS MOVING FORWARD, MAY HAVE MINOR
IMPACT ON PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: During an October 5 visit to the REO, Governor Wa'eli outlined progress made in his campaign to hold a referendum to form a Basra Regional Government. Wa'eli said that a referendum could be held no earlier than March 2009 and that it would not interfere with provincial elections, scheduled for January 31. In a follow-up meeting with the British Consul General, the Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) Director asserted that his office could handle concurrent referendum and provincial election registration procedures. End summary.

Status of Referendum

[12.](#) (SBU) In his update to the REO Director on the Basra referendum campaign, Governor Wa'eli confirmed that 28,000 signatures were collected, equivalent to over 2% of the electorate. (Note: Approximately 25,000 signatures are needed to meet the threshold of 2%. End note.) The next step is for the GEO to compare the signatures against the list of registered voters. This last step was supposed to have taken place in the past week, but has not yet been completed. GEO contacts have subsequently indicated to the REO that some of the signatures appear to be invalid and/or repetitive; confirmation will not necessarily be swift.

[13.](#) (U) According to Wa'eli, once GEO confirms the 2%, the referendum staff would be given another 6 to 8 weeks to get an additional 8% worth of signatures. After the full 10% is confirmed by GEO and forwarded to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in Baghdad, the request for a referendum would be referred to the Council of Ministers and a decision from the Prime Minister would be required within seven days. After that, preparations to hold the referendum would take an additional three months. Wa'eli estimated that March 2009 would be the earliest possible date for a referendum.

[14.](#) (SBU) In his efforts to show broad-based Basrawi enthusiasm for the referendum, Governor Wa'eli told the REO Director that a support committee has been formed, including 12 political parties, Basra social and influential figures, NGOs, tribal leaders, and Sunni minority representatives.

GEO Director Confident

[15.](#) (SBU) In a meeting the following day with the British Consul General, GEO Director Hazim Joda said that the referendum and provincial elections could take place and be handled simultaneously. He agreed with the Governor's assessment that the referendum, if it takes place, would most likely be held after the provincial elections. He conceded that concurrent referendum and provincial election registration process might place a strain on GEO resources, but was not overly concerned.

[16.](#) (SBU) Comment: While the idea of making Basra a region is popular with Basrawis - as Wa'eli puts it, Basrawis have been asking for this since 1921 - not everyone agrees. Some feel that the current government structure would suffice if the

contentious relationship between the central and provincial governments were to improve. It is far from clear that Wa'eli has the ability to gather 125,000 signatures or acquire final certification from GEO, IHEC, and the Prime Minister's Office. If the referendum registration process goes forward during the provincial election campaign, it may not derail the elections but will likely detract some of the voters' attention. The provincial elections may, however, affect the referendum as its legitimacy could be questioned, given that Wa'eli's outgoing governing team put the process forth. End comment.

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